

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 INR-07 L-03 ACDA-07

NSAE-00 PA-01 SS-15 PRS-01 SP-02 USIA-06 TRSE-00

NSC-05 (ISO) W

-----051501 230449Z /75

R 221457Z JUN 77

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0427

INFO SECDEF WASHDC

USMISSION NATO

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR, NATO, PINT, BE

SUBJECT: ATTITUDE OF BELGIAN POLITICAL PARTIES TOWARD
NATO

REF: USNATO 4567,171648Z JUN 77

1. ON JUNE 16, THE BELGIAN PARLIAMENT DEBATED THE GOVERNMENT'S 1977 DEFENSE BUDGET AND ADJUSTMENTS TO 1976 DEFENSE BUDGET. THE DISCUSSION BROUGHT OUT THE VIEWS OF ALL MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES ON DEFENSE QUESTIONS AND, BY EXTENSION, ON BELGIUM'S PARTICIPATION IN NATO.

2. THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (PSC/CVP) WHICH HEADS THE CURRENT COALITION GOVERNMENT, PREDICTABLY CAME OUT FOUR-SQUARE FOR NATO. THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION OF CONTINUING "FIDELITY TO THE NATO DEFENSE ALLIANCE" WAS PRESENTED BY DEFENSE MINISTER VANDEN BOEYNANTS (PSC).

3. THE SOCIALIST PARTY (PSB/BSP) HAS TRADITIONALLY EMPHASIZED DOMESTIC ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL WELFARE OVER MILI-

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TARY SPENDING. NOW PART OF PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS' SECOND COALITION GOVERNMENT, THE SOCIALIST PARTY HAS MUFFLED ITS ANTI-MILITARIST DRUMS. THE PSB DEFENSE SPOKESMAN SAID THE PARTY WILL GO ALONG WITH DEFENSE POLICY AND PROPOSED EXPENDITURES "NOT WITH ENTHUSIASM BUT WITH A CERTAIN SERENITY." THE SOCIALIST PARTY WILL NEVERTHELESS CONTINUE TO URGE THAT BELGIUM'S NATO SPENDING BE HELD,

IF POSSIBLE, AT THE 1977 LEVEL.

4. THE VOLKSUNIE (VU), WHICH NORMALLY ANALYZES DEFENSE ISSUES FROM THE NARROW PERSPECTIVE OF FLEMISH NATIONALIST INTERESTS, HAS LONG EXHIBITED A PACIFIST STRAIN.

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ASSERTING THAT "WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PARTISANS OF NATO," DEFENSE SPOKESMAN (MATTHEYSENS) OFFERED A CHARACTERISTIC ENDORSEMENT OF THE DEFENSE POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT VU HAS JOINED. MATTHEYSENS CALLED FOR AN END OF THE COSTLY EAST-WEST ARMS RACE, ENCOURAGEMENT OF MILITARY REFORMS FAVORABLE TO FLEMISH INTERESTS AND SUPPORT OF MEASURES TO IMPROVE MILITARY MORALE.

5. THE LIBERAL PARTY (PVV/PRLW), WHICH WAS PART OF GOVERNMENT WHEN THE BUDGET WAS DRAWN UP BUT IS NOW IN OPPOSITION, INDICATED THAT IT WILL ABSTAIN WHEN THE DEFENSE BUDGET IS VOTED FOR PARTY POLITICAL REASONS, NOT BECAUSE OF SUBSTANTIVE OBJECTIONS.

6. THE OTHER OPPOSITION PARTY, THE WALLOON RALLY (RW), DID NOT SPEAK IN THE DEFENSE DEBATE.

7. THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCB), ATTEMPTING TO MAKE POLITICAL HAY, ATTACKED THE SOCIALISTS ON THE BASIS OF THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT PRESENTATION OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONTINUING SOVIET MILITARY BUILDUP, WHICH THE PCB SPOKESMAN (LEVAUX) FLATLY DENIED.

8. COMMENT. WORLD WAR II CONFIRMED BELGIUM'S AWARENESS OF ITS NEED TO PARTICIPATE IN A DEFENSIVE ALLIANCE, AN AWARENESS WHICH HAS BECOME THE MAINSTAY OF ITS FOREIGN POLICY. THE JUNE 16 DEBATE REAFFIRMS THE CENTRALITY OF THAT AWARENESS AND, WITH NUANCES ACCORDING TO PARTY, REAFFIRMS THE CONTINUED PROFOUND SUPPORT FROM RIGHT TO LEFT FOR NATO IN BELGIUM. CHAMBERS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL PARTIES, RELATIONS WITH REGIONAL ORGS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 22-Jun-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BRUSSE06543
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770224-0025
Format: TEL
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770629/aaaaayyn.tel
Line Count: 104
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01-Dec-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2062584
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ATTITUDE OF BELGIAN POLITICAL PARTIES TOWARD NATO
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, BE, NATO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/9b666078-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009